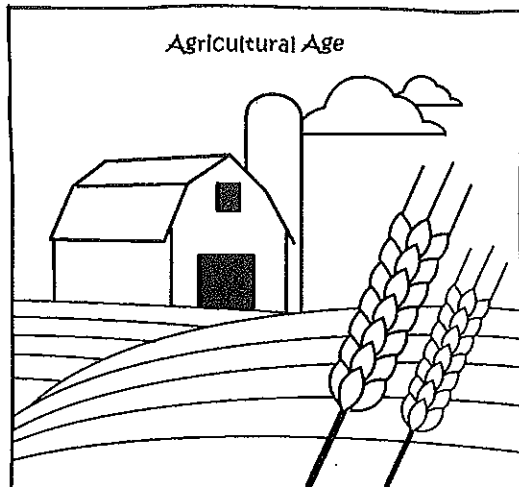


## How did we get here? Society's **Ask** through the Ages

If you think about it, it makes sense. In a democracy, the people govern by a set of rules and regulations made from the people by the people. At the backbone of a strong democracy stands an educated citizenry that continuously builds upon the previous generation's triumphs and failures, and seeks to raise the standard of living for those in the future. If an educated citizenry is the backbone of a strong democracy, then a strong education system is one of the pillars that comes from this foundation. Through the years, this has been the case of American public schooling.

During the birth of our nation, society needed citizens with basic functional skills for life in rural America, strong character and morals, and an understanding of the inner workings of a democracy. During this Agricultural Age, in early colonial America, the educational curriculum was religious-based upon the Bible—and focused on creating good citizens who could understand and obey common laws. Privately funded and focused on the boys of the town, instructional teaching methods consisted of tutorials, small group teaching, and one-to-one apprenticeships based upon specific trades. Girls were educated by the women of the town, and their education focused on duties of the home and the Bible. For most of the 1600s, society's needs were mainly focused on the elite. Early schools began to emerge in response to these needs—and answer society's **ask**.



Massachusetts led the way with the founding of Boston Public Schools in 1635. The Latin Grammar School consisted of curriculum for boys ages eight to 15. In 1636, Harvard was founded as the first college in the United States. Although Massachusetts required teaching in all towns over 20 people, the

concept that a common set of knowledge existed—and that all children must be schooled in it—only began to emerge as we entered the 18th century.

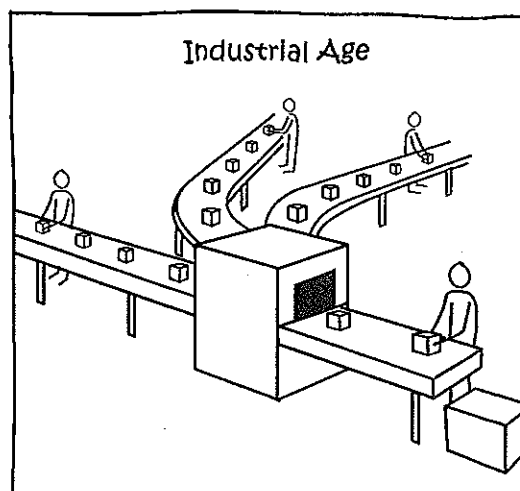
By the 1700s, colonial America evolved to a changing landscape of people, government, and daily needs. The influx of people from many countries brought with it different religious viewpoints and beliefs. This would cause the purpose and needs of classroom teaching to change with it, as people began to call for the teaching of their own religious doctrines. It was Thomas Jefferson who first introduced the idea of a free and accessible education for people regardless of religion, culture, status, or gender. It would take generations, however, before this idea would be fully realized.

Until the 1840s, only the wealthy could take advantage of the education system, but there were reformers such as Henry Barnard in Connecticut and Horace Mann in Massachusetts who opposed the idea of exclusiveness. When Mann published the *Common School Journal*, he brought educational concerns to the public. Reformers contended that common schooling resulted in a united society with less crime and poverty, and therefore produced good citizens. Due to the reform efforts, public elementary schooling was made available for all students by the end of the 1800s. In 1853, Massachusetts enacted the first compulsory school attendance laws.

As America moved into the 20th century, we found ourselves competing with fast-growing European economies. Society's needs began to change.

A new workforce was needed to keep America competitive. Society would again **ask** of its public schools to fill this need. By 1918, every state had passed compulsory education laws and required elementary school attendance.

By now, America had moved out of the Agricultural Age and found herself transitioning into an Industrial Revolution.



New jobs were emerging that required new skills. Society would turn to our public schools to help fill this need. Schools adapted to this new need by expanding educational opportunities beyond elementary school. New policies and practices would require high school attendance, and schools would be expected to create a curriculum that matched these new needs. A wide range of vocational offerings required new instructional teaching methods, new courses, and new materials to meet the demand of industrial careers.

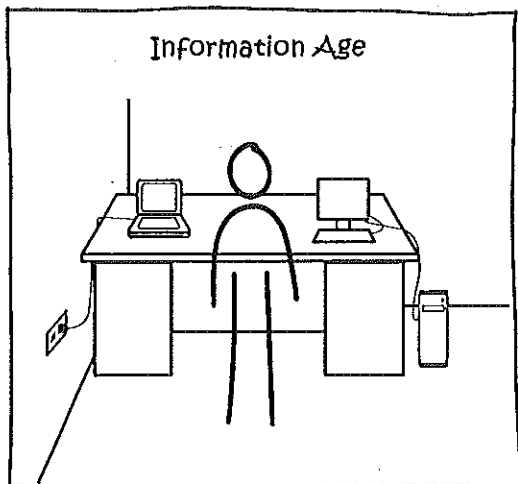
The rise in high school attendance is compelling evidence of how our schools have often responded to society's **ask** throughout history. During the 20th century's Industrial Age (1900–1993), the percentage of teenagers in the U.S. who graduated from high school increased from 6% to about 85%.

There would be other **asks** during the Industrial Age. Significant events of the 20th century played a major role in shaping school curriculum: The Great Depression, World War II, The Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the launch of Sputnik, 1983's *A Nation at Risk*, and more. As economic, political, and social events throughout the 20th century have come and gone, a shift in society's **ask** would occur. At every stage, our schools would be forced to respond to the call to meet these new needs.

By the end of the 20th century, the needs of our society began to shift yet again. The invention of the Internet helped usher America out of the Industrial Revolution and into the Information Age.

In the mid-1990s, then President Bill Clinton would challenge every classroom in America to be connected online by the start of the 21st century. The Information Age brought with it the Dot.com revolution, and required an entirely new set of skills for a knowledgeable workforce.

Schools would be challenged to design new academic standards to meet these new needs. Other policies like the No Child Left Behind Act and new charter school laws would also tell the story of society's **ask**. However, the Information Age would be short-lived.



Rapid technological advances, the rise of the Chinese and Indian economies, a political landscape that forever changed the course of American history on September 11, 2001—all brought about a new set of needs for American citizens.

Compelling calls from contemporary authors like Thomas Friedman, Daniel Pink, Howard Gardner, Richard Florida, and others have helped shape public discourse in this rapidly changing international global marketplace. As we detailed above, the short-lived Information Age, where life evolved

with the invention of the 1.0 Internet, gave rise to new and exciting Web 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0 tools. Today, we find ourselves in yet another transition—a transition framed around this new digital revolution, the Conceptual Age.

How will our public schools respond? What is society's new **ask**?

If we can learn from history, like the **asks** from previous generations, it will require an upgrade to our curriculum, new instructional methods and materials, a new profile of a global graduate, and an open mind. It will require modern teachers and contemporary leaders. What does this Conceptual Age look like to you?

